

It must have been as difficult for them as it was for me to talk across so wide a gulf, and some refused to try. I approached a woman whose name I had somehow remembered, pointed to my identity card, and held out my hand.

"I don't know you," she said, and held back.

"But I know you," I answered. "I have carried your name round for 50 years."

This plainly terrified her.

"I don't know you," she repeated, and turned her back on me.

Most did their best to remember, but not all succeeded. Some recalled incidents that I had myself completely forgotten—one of them an incident in my own child life that had made me a laughing stock at school for some weeks. As it was recalled by two men who had not themselves been in contact since, I must suppose that it happened and that I suffered the humiliation it brought me. I mention it as an indication that memory can be kind as well as cruel. Even yet I can recall only what they told me.

It was disturbing to think that so many had died, that so few had reached old age without physical failures in hearing, sight, or locomotion, that most of us were not even passably attractive to look at, and that a painfully small proportion still had their own teeth. A woman a little older than myself whom I remembered as a very pretty girl, and who was still comely, looked at me for a long time and then gave me this: "I've been looking for some trace of the boy I remember, but the only clue is your shape."

I DON'T suppose we should look for beauty after 57 years, especially in New Zealand where we are not, I think, very beautiful to begin with. But I hope others felt as strongly as I did that if we were not much to look at we were

SOMEHOW GOOD

a rather encouraging lot to think about. Not many of us had achieved what the world calls distinction, and few, I think, had gained wealth. We were a little better off, on the average, than our parents had been, and some of us had a little more polish. Life had been easier for most of us than it had been for them, and education had been cheaper.

But our real claim to such crumbs of complacency as all may now and again allow themselves was, I feel tempted to say, this—that we had come through 60 or 70 years without much pretence or humbug. Appearances I know are deceptive, but they are not meaningless. You can't assemble 800 people for a celebration, hold them together for three days, and keep all the rogues and spongers hidden. If there was no sign of them, I think the reason was that they were not there.

I am sure that there were few snobs among us, few who despised their origins or had forgotten the way they had come. So far as it is possible to gauge such

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things, I gained the impression that most of us had paid our way as men and women and neighbours. Wherever we had started, we had somehow or other ended upright and on our own feet. I felt that there were not many among us who were merely vain and foolish and useless, few who were crooked or corrupt, and perhaps not one who had deliberately chosen to be. Whatever it means in a more exacting analysis, I find it a comforting thought that vulgar boys and giggling girls can make fools of the prophets of woe.

I TAKE leave of Otago with a curious question. It was sent to me by a reader in Christchurch, and I have no (continued on next page)

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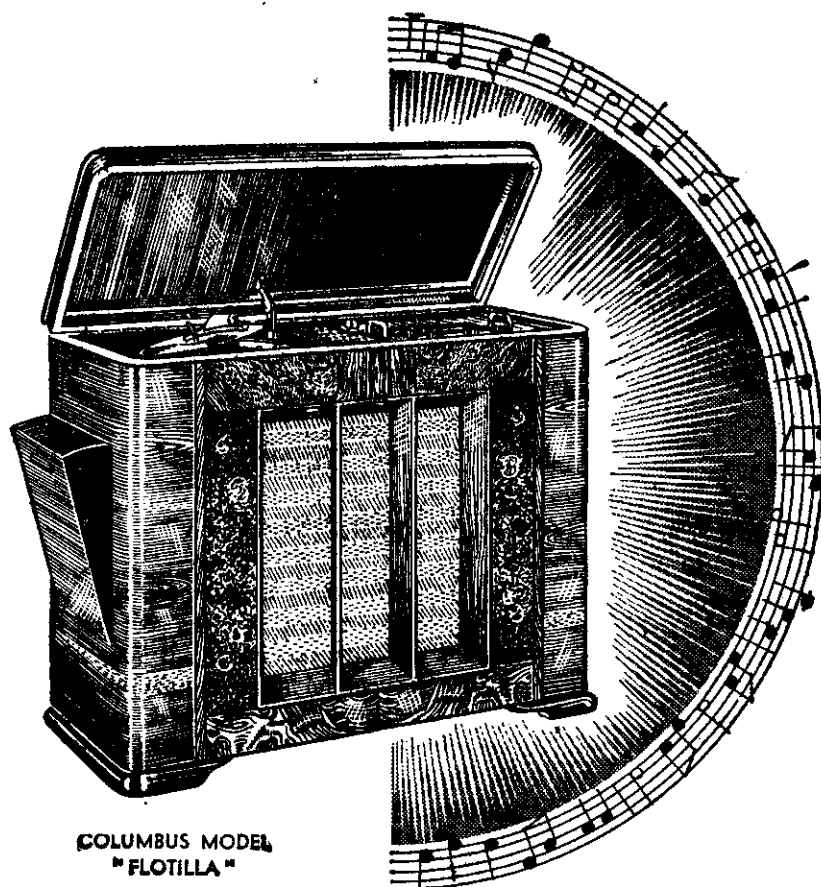
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